

Stakeholder Issue Assessment Themes and Recommendations on Salton Sea Stakeholder Engagement

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Overview

The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) will be providing impartial facilitation for advisory committee and collaborative stakeholder engagement efforts to facilitate effective and inclusive implementation of the Salton Sea 10-year Management Plan.

To prepare, CBI conducted 28 interviews with 38 people to understand stakeholder goals and expectations for working together and the potential for enhancing collaboration across agencies and organizations on Salton Sea management. Interviewees represent federal, state, regional, and local agencies, non-profit organizations, communities, and special districts with interests in air quality, environment, environmental justice, public health, and water supply and management.

This summary provides key findings without attribution as well as CBI's recommendations for next steps in terms of process. CBI's goal is to help the State of California structure a stakeholder engagement process that uses stakeholder time wisely, allows the State to effectively draw on collective expertise, and leads to broadly supported action.

Format and Review Process

CBI presented interview findings in early June; the contents here formed that presentation. CBI invited interviewees to review the findings section and participants at the June presentation to let CBI know if there were any inaccuracies or critical omissions. Needless to say, this brief section cannot do justice to the deep knowledge, nuanced perceptions, and experience of the many stakeholders interviewed. These findings are intended to highlight *key* themes and concerns cited in the interviews rather than provide an exhaustive summary of all comments.

PART 1: Interview Findings

1. Currently Recognized Window of Opportunity

The 10-Year Plan has broad support as a **roadmap for Phase 1 action**, as does the notion of a smaller but sustainable lake.

Recent state **funding** of \$80 million provides for implementing much-needed projects. There is broad understanding that an incremental approach to developing funding is necessary.

The March 2017 tour for high-level officials has deepened understanding among **state leadership** and increased state-level awareness.

Senator Hueso, Senator Hertzberg's and Assemblyman Garcia recent statements and actions indicate commitment to **significant, concrete action** by the State and key stakeholders in 2017.

The State has shown a commitment to engaging stakeholders by convening this **Assessment** (and opportune timing with the 10-Year Plan release).

Discussions between the **State of California and Imperial Irrigation District and others** regarding IID's **Petition** to the State Water Resources Control Board and the 10-Year Plan appear to be leading to increased understanding and potential joint commitments.

The termination of **Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) mitigation water** deliveries to the Salton Sea in 2017 is contributing to an increased sense of urgency, focus, and momentum for implementing projects on the ground.

Stakeholders are increasingly seeing the **linkages between the Salton Sea and water supply issues in California and the West**. The future of the Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan and the Minute 32x agreement between the U.S. and Mexico is contingent on effectively managing the Sea and securing long-term commitment to that management. Likewise, stakeholders sense that long-term stability and predictability for California's Colorado River water supplies translates into less pressure on the Bay Delta.

2. External Challenges

Some 'opportunities' are also challenges.

- End of **QSA mitigation water deliveries** in 2017.
- Imperial Irrigation District's support for regional and international Colorado River supply and allocation issues (**Drought Contingency Plan, Minute 32x**) is linked to the immediate future of Salton Sea management.
- Some view failure to manage the Salton Sea as posing risks to **California water supply issues**: uncertainty for future water transfers and less predictability for long-term Colorado River supplies means more pressure on Bay Delta and California Water Fix.
- Securing **federal funding** requires a **unified voice** among state and local entities and a direction and plan for moving forward.

State Leadership: Misalignment exists between the State’s sense of its responsibility for the Salton Sea and stakeholder perceptions of it, based on actions to date. While state leaders indicate in interviews a clear state-level commitment to the Sea, many stakeholders perceive a lack of State prioritization of Salton Sea efforts at the highest levels.

- Stakeholders perceive that the State is not acting cohesively—the different agencies are not always aware of one another’s activity on the Salton Sea.
- Implementation of projects has been slower than stakeholders would like.

To many interviewees, ‘**state prioritization**’ would mean the following:

- **Resources.** Commitment of sufficient staff resources for project management and on-the-ground implementation, monitoring, and adaptive planning under the direction of the Assistant Secretary, in close collaboration with local management agencies and community, regional, and federal partners.
- **Funding.** California and its partners commit to funding the Salton Sea Management Program for the duration of the water transfers.
- **Durability.** Clear commitment and accountability by the State to ensuring a smaller but sustainable Salton Sea that addresses the immediate and significant public health and habitat impacts of the declining water supply to the Sea.
- **Timing.** State commitment to accelerate project implementation, at a rate commensurate with the rate of playa exposure.

Tensions and challenges in relationships within the local area and between local/regional entities with the State have hindered progress. **Balancing local and state leadership** is instrumental to successful management.

Establishing a governance structure that engages the key entities is necessary to inform the State in its decision making to implement its responsibilities, and to provide a clear mechanism for problem solving, prioritizing projects, and coordinated implementation.

Burdens of risk feel unequal when comparing local communities’ public health impacts to those of the State or others.

Stakeholders experience **resignation and fatigue** with so many years of so little progress, leading to decreased credibility of the process. Near-term project implementation will demonstrate advancement and increase understanding for future projects.

3. Existing Stakeholder Process

Identified Strengths

- The right people are assembled and committed to participate.
- Interviewees recognize the need for a strong facilitated stakeholder process to guide decisions and draw on stakeholder expertise.
- The science committee is a valuable forum for cross-pollination across disciplines and issues.

- In general, the necessary data/science exists to support management and project implementation.
- Stakeholders view favorably the role of the Assistant Secretary to work across agencies and have access to high-level leadership.
- Stakeholders are willing and committed to working together to garner funding.
- There is a strong belief that, when the State commits resources and staff, it has the capacity (and track record) to effectively manage highly complex, multi-stakeholder resource management challenges.

Identified Weaknesses/Challenges

- Sense that managing the planning effort and stakeholder engagement process requires more resources than committed to date. Need for **additional staff** to help the State manage the process.
- Need for clearer **goals, objectives, and deliverables** for committees, **linked to broader plan and timeline**.
- Stakeholders recognize need for **clear decision-making** and advisory role for stakeholder engagement.
- Wish to see **State as clear convener** of the advisory committee process, setting its direction in active collaboration with stakeholders. Advisory committees tapped for **advice and consultation to refine and implement projects** on the ground to achieve planning goals.
- Would like to see more local residents engaged in committee process.
- Need for more **strategic focus** (e.g., agenda development, meeting design), **active facilitation, and follow up** for advisory committee meetings to ensure they are effective, productive, and focused use of participants' time and lead to direct results.
- Need for more **communication, cross pollination, and coordination** among committees.
- Some sense that long-range planning, while necessary, has **distracted** from short-term project implementation to address immediate needs. Most agree that long-range planning and long-term vision are necessary, but must be managed appropriately.
- Need to ensure meaningful consultation with **local public health officials and local citizen stakeholders** regarding the direction and efficacy of management strategies for the Salton Sea to address public health needs.
- Acknowledging frustration on past delays on Salton Sea while expressing concern that continued criticism creates tensions between stakeholders, takes up valuable meeting time, and causes further delay.

Interviewee Suggested Improvements

- Need state **work plan** that integrates advisory committee consultation to refine and implement projects.
- Need clear **charter/scope** of work for each committee, describing its role in achieving planning goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes.

- Need **facilitation** to ensure advisory committee meetings are clearly framed and designed, well facilitated, and documented to be focused, productive, and strategically integrated into broader planning efforts.
- Need for **additional staff** to help **organize, track, staff, and ensure overall accountability** of advisory stakeholder process.
- **Enhance integration and communication** between committees – e.g., through periodic joint meetings and internal web-based communication platform.
- **Organize and draw on local residents and communities** around how they can be helping advance the process.
- Ensure that **long-range planning** happens in tandem with immediate project needs, without distracting time/focus from project implementation.
- Need for strong **coordination and partnering** between the State and U.S. in advancing the Salton Sea Management Program, recognizing a successful process and outcome will require leadership, policy guidance, technical/science expertise, and funding from both the state and federal government.
- Facilitation of **one-on-one discussions** between agency partners, outside of larger meetings, where useful to support broader collaborative process and problem solving.

PART 2: CBI Observations

While significant common ground among key entities is apparent, among some parties the historic relationships, trust deficit, and/or existing or past misunderstandings can pose barriers to collaboration. In some cases, convening and facilitating one-on-one dialogue among or between groups as part of a ‘re-boot’ of the overall collaborative process may be useful.

Stakeholders exhibit a strong commitment and willingness to engage in managing the Salton Sea. Harnessing that commitment in a way that is productive and yields projects-on-the-ground would be a goal and critical underpinning of stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholders lack clarity on the role of the Salton Sea Task Force into the near future and its relationship to the Assistant Secretary of Natural Resources and the implementation of the 10-Year Management Plan.

PART 3: CBI Recommendations

Based on the stakeholder issue assessment, CBI would recommend the following refinements to the stakeholder engagement process.

Guidelines for a Successful Engagement

- Establish a work plan for stakeholder engagement that ties directly to the State’s work plan for implementing the 10-year plan.
- Connect the advisory committee charge and overall work plan.

- Clarify decision making and how will input be used. The state supports this process and will consider stakeholder input in advancing management of the Salton Sea.
- Convene in-person meetings for pivotal information, problem solving, and developing recommendations; online meetings for information sharing.
- Create effective feedback loops by tracking requests for input and summaries of stakeholder discussions.
- Inform and engage local communities and residents in support of advancing projects and creating the long-range vision.

Reconvene as a Primary Advisory Committee to Advance Salton Sea Management

A primary advisory committee would work together to advance action and problem solve on Salton Sea management. The group's role would be to advise the state on implementing the 10-Year Plan and adapting it as appropriate for longer-term planning. The advisory committee's meeting framework and work plan would tie directly to the State's work plan for implementing the 10-year plan. The intent of establishing a primary advisory committee is to streamline communication and input on planning, design, and management issues and manage workload associated with participating and facilitating the advisory process. CBI would anticipate that the primary advisory committee would meet two or three times annually.

A **small coordination committee** would work with the State and facilitation team to develop stakeholder work plan and guide agenda development for committee meetings. The coordination group would refine and strengthen proposals in advance of committee meetings when appropriate. CBI would work with stakeholders to determine the coordination group composition, but would envision it would be a small, nimble group representing key interests.

Task Sub-Committees as needed to carry out Focused Work

The primary stakeholder advisory committee would **task sub-committees as needed** to implement objectives. Each task assignment would clarify the goals, objectives, and deliverables as linked to the broader work plan. The sub-committee structure would likely be modified at an early meeting as many have mentioned that combining a few might make sense. Sub-committees would meet on as-needed basis.

Existing Committees

- **Air Quality Committee** – coordinates with air boards, the QSA water transfer mitigation program, and committees to integrate air quality.
- **Environmental Compliance Committee** – develops strategy for environmental documentation and permitting.
- **Funding Committee** – develops future funding.
- **Project Committee** – provides detailed problem solving as needed for design and feasibility.
- **Public Outreach Committee** – designs and implements outreach to the broader public and community.

- **Long Range Committee** – Considers long-range solutions and develops the long-range plan.
- **Science Committee** – provides scientific expertise to the State of California in reviewing various plans and efforts.

Appendix: Interviews Conducted

Listed alphabetically by organizational name. Some interviews conducted in small groups.

1. Audubon California: Andrea Jones, Mike Lynes, and Frank Ruiz
2. CA Department of Water Resources, Kent Nelson
3. CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, Michael Flores
4. CA Governor's Office, Ken Alex
5. CA Natural Resources Agency, Keali'i Bright
6. CA Natural Resources Agency, Bruce Wilcox
7. Coachella Valley Association of Governments, Katie Barrows
8. Coachella Valley Water District: Steve Bigley, Robert Cheng and Dan Farris
9. Colorado River Board of CA, Chris Harris
10. Comité Cívico Del Valle, Luis Olmedo
11. Coulter Stewart, Community Stakeholder; Former Publisher of Government West Magazine; Former Senior Consultant to State Assembly Energy Subcommittee
12. County of Imperial: Ralph Cordova, Robin Hodgkin, Andy Horne, Rebecca Terrazas-Baxter, County of Imperial
13. Defenders of Wildlife, Kim Delfino
14. Eco Media Compass, Kerry Morrison
15. Imperial Irrigation District: Kevin Kelley and Tina Shields
16. Pacific Institute, Michael Cohen
17. Val Simon, Private Consultant and Community Stakeholder
18. Riverside County, Pat Cooper
19. Salton Sea Authority: Phillip Johnson, Phil Rosentrater
20. San Diego Water Authority, Dan Denham
21. Sierra Club: Sarah Friedman, Joan Taylor
22. South Coast Air Pollution Control District: Jason Low
23. Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians, Shawn Muir
24. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Marc Maynard
25. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chris Schoneman
26. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Carol Roberts
27. U.S. Geological Survey, Doug Barnum
28. Water Foundation, Andrew Fahlund